

REACTION ON THE TECHNICAL PAPER OF MS. MIGUELA MENA ON
“DEVELOPING THE OPERATIONAL DEFINITION AND MEASUREMENT TOOLS FOR
DOMESTIC TOURISM IN THE PHILIPPINES”
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Tourism is undoubtedly recognized as the world's largest and fastest growing industry today. As a product and service-oriented industry, tourism generates financial flows that have tangible economic impacts. Apart from contributing significantly to the national economy by raising revenues through tourism receipts, the industry also serves as a potent catalyst for employment generation.

According to the 1998 figures of the World Tourism Organization, 448 billion US dollars was earned by the tourism industry in 1997. Figures from the World Travel and Tourism Council in 1995 also showed that the travel and tourism industry provided employment to 212 million people worldwide. In the Philippine setting, record tourism earnings was in 1997 with tourism receipts reaching 2.8 billion US dollars, according to DOT figures.

Domestic tourism is considered the backbone of the tourism industry. Domestic tourist consumption in top tourist destinations in the world like Australia, Canada, France and the US contributed more than 60 percent to the total tourist consumption in these countries. However, many developing countries including the Philippines have not really given enough attention in measuring the impact of domestic tourism in the economy compared to its more glamorous counterpart, that is foreign or international tourism.

How then do we measure the economic impact of domestic tourism to the national economy? The WTO addressed this concern by introducing the Tourism Satellite Account (TSA) in 1999. The TSA is aimed at

measuring the economic contribution of tourism to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and employment.

However, given the realities in the Philippine setting, it is difficult to measure or make a headcount on domestic tourism traffic based on the following reasons: 1) many so-called domestic tourists do not check in accommodation facilities since they stay with friends and relatives; 2) current headcount system is based on hotel stay and on the data supplied by DOT accredited establishments; and 3) the lack of manpower in all DOT regional offices, making it difficult to efficiently carry out data gathering, analysis, interpretation and compilation.

Knowing the current limitations besetting data collection on domestic tourism statistics, this study is a timely response to the pressing need to quantify and qualify the contribution of domestic tourism to the national economy.

Thus, we cannot underestimate the importance of statistics in tourism planning and development specifically in terms of policy formulation and design of an effective marketing plan. Statistics serve as the blueprint, a guide for market planners and developers on how best to create appropriate and efficient marketing plans and programs that would hit the target market.

The significance of reliable tourism statistics was underscored during the Consultation Workshop on Tourism Master Plan updating, where one of the key lessons on the implementation of the Philippine Tourism Master Plan cited the need to establish a more reliable database on tourism flows, values and impacts in order to effectively set and monitor quantitative tourism targets. The National Tourism Action Plan also mentioned the necessity of reviewing and enhancing data gathering procedures to secure better output in market research and intelligence.

This paper on “Developing the Operational Definition and Measurement Tools for Domestic Tourism in the Philippines” comes at the most opportune time. The study is a worthwhile undertaking since it is high time that the impact of domestic tourism on the economy is determined. This serves as an important tool for decision makers to have a sound basis in formulating public policies and marketing strategies for tourism in the country.

With the dearth of data on domestic tourism statistics, the proposed survey is a significant research activity that will provide tourism planners and policy makers a better understanding of the dynamics of supply and demand within the context of domestic tourism. It’s important for industry planners and players to know specific characteristics of potential clients (i.e. domestic tourists) so that products and services can be appropriately matched and provided.

By getting a profile of domestic tourists to include not only the socio-economic and demographic variables, but also their purchasing and consumption patterns like needs, desires, attitudes, behaviors and satisfaction levels, tourism marketing planners will be able to design and develop suitable and cost-efficient marketing strategies. Data culled from the survey will be analyzed and utilized as basis in formulating appropriate marketing segmentation strategies and programs.

However, to be effective, the gathering of domestic statistics and monitoring of domestic trends should be conducted on a regular basis so that reliable data or information can be monitored. Likewise, there is a need to come up with guidelines on the methods/tools and operational definitions to produce and disseminate harmonized and reliable statistical information.

For easy reference and common understanding, the definition of terms “domestic traveler, domestic visitor, domestic tourist and domestic

same-day visitor or excursionist” be simplified. From the definitions given, a domestic visitor can be misconstrued as a domestic same-day visitor or excursionist as well. It is for this reason that this suggestion is made – we use the term “visitor or excursionist” for same-day travelers while “tourist” refers to “overnight travelers”. A traveler could either be a visitor/excursionist or a tourist.

Another classification criteria can be added, that is – “Classification by Activities Undertaken/Engaged in”, It is important to know this characteristic to determine the interests of various domestic market segments when developing tourism products.

The researchers/statisticians are in a better position to assess which methodologies and measurement tools are necessary in conducting the survey that would ensure maximum data collection. The challenge lies more in the translation of tourism statistics to a user-friendly material for industry practitioners. In development communication parlance, this process is called “popularization” of scientific materials.

Understanding research results is equally hard for end-users as most outputs are highly technical and academic in style and form. Output of studies/surveys that make up tourism statistics will have to be “popularized” or translated to simple terms, stripping it if possible with highly technical jargon so that industry players would be able to better appreciate and understand tourism facts and figures.

To effectively monitor tourism trends in the country, the system of collecting data and statistics should be standardized and institutionalized from the national down to the municipal level. This would make data comparison and analysis much easier. This study on measuring domestic tourism in the Philippines is one huge step towards that end as it will help harmonize the various interpretations and tools presently being used in the industry.

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